

# THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE  
ASSOCIATION OF ASSISTANT LIBRARIANS

(Section of the Library Association)

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HON. EDITOR : S. C. HOLLIDAY

Kensington Public Libraries

## Editorial

AN official account of the Annual General Meeting appears on a following page, but a Cockney editor may be permitted to report that Cambridge "done us proud." It was a well-attended meeting, a well-organized meeting, and a well-fed meeting. Credit and thanks are due to the civic dignitaries, to Mr. Munford and the staffs of the public and county libraries, and to the university authorities. Three hundred and four members had a very good time—especially those powerfully-thewed maidens who bore down on the tea-tables with the faery delicacy of a commando raid.

The President referred to the special importance of the Association as a training ground for public speaking, where free and frank expression of opinion was encouraged. We feel, however, that the President should have roared this part of his address, for he had the misfortune to be faced by three hundred-odd mutes. We are (we hope) a man of peace, yet we cannot help feeling that the Association would have demonstrated greater virility had the Annual Meeting developed into a first-class brawl. God knows, the world is suffering enough from idle and insincere verbiage, but surely "youth is wild, with bugle and spear, and counter cry." Are members shy—or merely clueless? Are the affairs of the Association so well conducted that the Council and the Hon. Officers do not merit just a tittle of abuse? We doubt it. Members must beware of becoming a host of phantom listeners, for silent consent encourages the Schickelgrubers of librarianship—and there are not a few candidates for that title.

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*Situations vacant.*—" . . . Fetch me a partner's desk a swivel chair two armchairs four telephones a scrambler telephone three secretaries a typing pool five technical librarians and a cup of tea with a small piece of short-cake. That'll do till we get a proper establishment."—(Nigel Balchin : *Lord, I was afraid.*)<sup>1</sup>

*Trouble brewing.*—"Daily bathe and powder your feet, dry thoroughly between the toes, and do the following few simple exercises : (1) Stand on a book and curl your toes over the edge . . ." etc., etc. (Scottish Council for Health Education : *Be kind to your feet.*)

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by courtesy of the publishers, Messrs. Collins.

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### NOTICE OF ELECTION

Nominations are invited for the following Officers and Councillors of the Association for 1948 :—

Honorary Secretary  
Honorary Treasurer  
Honorary Editor.

Nationally elected Councillors—six.

Nominations must be made by two or more members of the Association, countersigned by the nominee, and submitted in writing to reach me not later than 15th October, 1947.

Central Public Library,  
Blackpool.

E. CAVE,  
*Hon. Secretary.*

## Fifty-second Annual General Meeting

**I**N coach loads from the Midland, East Midland and Greater London Divisions, and by devious means from places as far afield as Bristol and Newcastle, Wolverhampton and Norwich, Blackpool and Hull, altogether 304 members of the Association of Assistant Librarians met in Cambridge on Wednesday, 9th July, on the occasion of the Association's 52nd Annual General Meeting.

Lunch was taken in the Guildhall, and afterwards members formed into groups to visit one of the following :—The Cambridge University Press, The Cambridge University Library, various Colleges and College Libraries, and the Pepysian Library, Magdalene College.

Tea, taken at 4.30 p.m. in the Guildhall, was by invitation of the Worshipful the Mayor of Cambridge (Councillor F. Doggett, J.P.) who was present with the Mayoress, and who extended to the Association a civic welcome to his town. Councillor S. C. Roberts, M.A. (Chairman of the Cambridge Public Libraries Committee) also welcomed members on behalf of his Committee, and Mr. H. W. Marr, President of the Association, replied with thanks.

The Annual General Meeting followed tea, the retiring President, (Mr. J. T. Gillett) in the Chair until he formally handed over to Mr. H. W. Marr.

The Minutes of the previous Annual General Meeting, held at Nottingham on 25th July, 1946, were taken as read and signed by the Chairman. On the motion of Mr. Tighe, seconded by Miss Smith, the Annual Report of the Council for the year ended 31st December, 1946, as published in the May-June *Assistant* was received and adopted. On the motion of the Hon. Treasurer (Mr. Clough) seconded by Mr. Tighe, the Report of the Hon. Treasurer and Hon. Auditors for the year ended 31st December, 1946, was received and adopted. Mr. Drewery moved, Mr. Taylor seconded, and it was agreed that Messrs. P. Harrison, F.L.A. and W. Kitchen, A.L.A. (both of Hull P.L.) be elected Hon. Auditors for the year ending 31st December, 1947.

At this stage, Mr. Gillett formally handed over the Office of President to Mr. H. W. Marr, and paid tribute to Mr. Marr's work on behalf of the Association both in the Yorkshire Division and in the wider sphere; the President in reply reiterated his faith in the Association and expressed the hope that as President he would worthily carry on its traditions.

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On the motion of the President, seconded by Mr. Tighe, the motion from the Council

"That Rule 5 (b) be amended to read as follows: 'The Honorary Treasurer of the Association shall pay annually to the Honorary Treasurers of the Divisions a sum calculated *per capita* on the membership of each Division at 31st December of the previous year. The *per capita* figure shall be decided each year by the Council after consideration of the finances of all Divisions.' This Rule, however, shall not preclude the Council from varying by resolution the amount of grant to any Division because of local circumstances."

was carried, *nem con*.

Mr. Marr then delivered his Presidential address (printed below) which was warmly received, and the members' thanks to Mr. Marr were expressed by Mr. Gillett.

The Hon. Treasurer moved the Association's thanks to Mr. W. A. Munford, Borough Librarian of Cambridge, members of the Cambridge Public and Cambridgeshire County Library staffs, and the responsible authorities at the Cambridge University Press, the Cambridge University Library, and the various Colleges and College Libraries visited, for their assistance in arranging and carrying out the day's programme. This was carried with acclamation, and Mr. Munford, in reply, enumerated the various people concerned with the success of the day.

Mr. Bryon asked if steps could be taken to resume monthly publication of the *Assistant*. The President replied that this should have been brought up under the relevant section of the Annual Report, but gave an assurance that he would have the matter referred to the Press and Publications Committee with a view to steps being taken as soon as possible.

The President declared the Meeting closed at 6.35 p.m.

E. C.

## Presidential Address

H. W. Marr

FORTUNATELY for me, the A.A.L. Presidential Address is usually given a kinder timing than that of the President of the Library Association, and after the delightful hospitality we have just experienced and the crowded events of to-day, you will be less critical of what I have to say than you would have been six or eight hours ago. Unfortunately for you, my address must be extended to fill several pages of cold print, and if it seems tedious (and I don't suppose it can claim to be unique in that respect), there are so many fewer pages of a future issue of the *Assistant* that you need to read.

What are we who call ourselves Assistant Librarians? I think we can be divided into three groups. There are not a few who are assistants no longer—little Chiefs and some big Chiefs—who perhaps regret the passing of their salad days and who, to quote Mr. Cave in a recent letter, "do not wish to make a complete break with the live Association to which their past has been so closely linked." A second, and perhaps the largest, group is composed of active younger members who are prepared to give up their half-day in order to meet colleagues—or perhaps future wives or husbands—at these meetings. Thirdly, there are those of us who have given up any ambitions we may have had to be either little Chiefs or big Chiefs, and who certainly cannot any longer claim to be young. And here I am reminded of the story of the headmaster who was discussing with one of his old pupils as to who should be selected to present the prizes

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from a distinguished list of Old Boys. The pupil said he thought it would be a good idea if, instead of looking for someone successful, someone who had failed in life were approached, as the school could probably learn more from his experiences. "A brilliant idea," said the headmaster, "—and will you be the first of the series?" I hope that those were not the grounds upon which I was placed in the position of having to address you to-day.

Let me say in all seriousness, however, that I am very proud of the honour which through your Council, you have conferred upon me as a representative of the third group that I have just described, a group which, I think, has not often provided the A.A.L. with its President, but which has included many devoted Librarians holding responsible positions who have remained behind the scenes writing other men's letters. Only one or two of them indeed, such as Woodbine of Birmingham, were ever well known in the profession.

My theme to-day, however, is not of our groups, but of what is common to us all, or most of us—and firstly the "Scheme of Conditions of Service," or, to give it its popular title, "The National Charter" for local government officers, which was a newly born infant at the time of our last Annual General Meeting. During the intervening twelve months it has developed into a strapping youngster, and the time seems to be appropriate to review briefly some of the changes which have taken place in the conditions under which the assistant librarian of to-day lives and works as compared with his father and grandfather, and to consider the effects of those changes upon our Association.

In order to give you some idea of the dark depths from which we have risen, let me refer you to that ancient classic on librarianship, Greenwood's "Public Libraries," where, on the subject of salaries and hours of duty—probably the two most important items when considering conditions of service—we read: "He (the Librarian) is in fact too many cases the worst paid of any public official, and when it comes to the question of soliciting an advance in salary, and the question of going through the mill of the Committee, and worse still the pulverizing machinery of ratification by the town council, the whole process is so spirit-crushing that many librarians prefer to go struggling on year after year with an income far too small for the labour and the responsibility of the office, than to pass through the ordeal." And again, whilst hours of opening were usually from 9 a.m. or 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. or 10 p.m. "there should be for the chief librarian and his assistants two or three hours off each day, and an entire half-day holiday per week should be given. The chief librarian should not be expected to be at his post more than two or three evenings a week after 6 p.m."

You will notice that it was only the chief librarian who should not be expected to work more than two or three evenings each week; the assistant might be expected to work *only* five evenings, with perhaps a half-day holiday. Parenthetically let me add that the first time sheet which I worked as a young assistant was so arranged that I was on duty on alternate weeks six evenings and five evenings respectively until 9 p.m. I was allowed a half-day holiday on alternate weeks. The only variation was that every third week the finishing time was 9.30 p.m. instead of 9 p.m. I was certainly allowed three hours off duty every day—two hours for lunch and one hour for tea, which must be taken together from 2 to 5 p.m. It must not be forgotten, of course, that there was no inclination at that time on the part of library assistants, nor indeed, on the part of municipal officers as a body, to give any attention to their conditions of service. They were a docile band, content to serve the public in the particular sphere which they had chosen, or which had been chosen for them, as their career, and hoping always that,

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without any effort on their part, some fairy godmother would come along and improve their conditions.

Such then was the position, with perhaps very slight improvements, up to the time of the first World War. It has become customary, during the life-time of most of us, for either the first or second World War to be regarded as the datum line for important changes of any kind. In this particular instance, however, it happened that the end of the first World War coincided with the passing of the 1919 Act, and it was, of course, the latter event which meant so much to libraries and librarianship.

I have referred to the docility of the earlier generations of library staffs; but it is possible, indeed it is highly probably, that their disinclination to press for better remuneration and better conditions was partly dictated by the knowledge of the severe restrictions placed upon library authorities by the limitation of the penny rate. This millstone was ever present at all gatherings where librarians met, and the marvel is that in spite of it librarianship progressed as well as it did. We have evidence that an awakening was taking place very early in the present century, and in 1911 there was presented to the Annual Meeting of this Association perhaps the most important work that had so far been prepared on the subject, the "Report on the hours, salaries, training and conditions of service of assistants in British municipal libraries." This report disclosed the great variation in the number of hours worked by assistants, the average for the country being 45 per week, and commented on the tendency towards adopting a standard working week of 42 hours. The report also condemned the time sheets in operation in many libraries, whereby assistants were required to work every day from early morning until late at night, with lengthy intervals for lunch and tea, with the exception of one half-day and one evening off duty. Some little improvement was eventually forthcoming. I have no doubt that any of you who were in the library service in the days before 1939 will remember that right up to the outbreak of war a half-day and one evening off duty were still general, but on the remaining days of the week either the morning or the afternoon off duty was usually allowed. With the decreased evening demand on library services during the last war it was often found possible to release more members of the staff in the evenings, so that three evenings off duty, including the half-day holiday, became general, and four evenings not uncommon. Let us hope that the five-day week—for others, but not for us, said NALGO at Southport—has perpetuated war-time arrangement of hours of duty into our austerity peace. We realise, of course, that in this matter we are at all times governed by the public demand.

I am not so happy by far on the question of salaries as I am on that of hours of duty. On the latter we equate with our colleagues in the local government service in the number of hours worked; their arrangement may safely be left in the hands of the chief officers concerned. The position regarding salaries is entirely different. I am aware that considerable improvement has taken place, but who will deny the necessity for that improvement? There is equality for all within the General Division grade, but once outside that grade, the conditions as they applied in Greenwood's day still prevail to some extent. The Librarian may not now be the worst paid of any public official, but he is usually very low on the list of chief officers, whilst his subordinates usually occupy correspondingly low positions in relation to their colleagues in other departments. The Library Association recently published two suggested scales of salaries—one for chief librarians and the other for subordinates—which, at first glance, appeared to be fantastic. A more careful study of the scales, however, shows that their fantastic appearance is due to the effort of the Library Association to place librarians in a

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position more nearly equal to their colleagues in the local government service. That wretched barrier to our work which was imposed by the penny rate limitation has done untold harm by reason of the fact that it set in the mind of the people an unjust measure of our value. I fear it will be a long, long time before we can eradicate this grave injustice, and until that day arrives our salaries will not reach the standard which we think should be achieved. Far too many councils still play us off against the "trading department" staffs, who are supposed to deserve higher salaries because they can produce tangible profits. Perhaps we are not adroit enough in our salesmanship. What is more profitable than the reader going on to earn £1,000 a year after studying "How to win friends and influence people," or the perfect wife brought up on Mr. Beeton?

I have so far considered two major matters affecting library assistants as individuals. Let us now reflect for a while upon matters concerning our Association. Much of what I want to say is not original, but there are some in my audience to whom it will be new, and for that reason I crave the indulgence of those of you to whom the Association is an open book.

The Association is now 52 years old, the first meeting having been held in London on the 3rd July, 1895, when it was founded as the Library Assistants' Association. It maintained a separate existence until the beginning of 1930, when it became a Section of the Library Association. Its history provides a record of which it has every reason to be proud.

The Association was formed to meet and provide for the special needs of assistants which were not already provided for in any other professional organisation existing at that time. One of the most important of those special needs, and one which is equally important to-day, was to act as a training ground for young librarians in such matters as public speaking, where free and frank expression of opinion was, and is, encouraged; control of meetings; and committee procedure. With the progress of education, local authorities were adopting the Libraries Acts in greater numbers, and promotion to chiefships became rapid. Many of those young chiefs of 40 or 50 years ago rose, as we all know, to great eminence in our profession before they eventually passed into retirement. Several did not allow the sharp axe of superannuation to lessen their interest in our affairs. That process of training has continued without interruption. A number of our colleagues, still young, who were active in the affairs of the Association a decade or so ago, now have their feet firmly planted at various points on the road to the top of the hill, and, as sure as night follows day, will reach the pinnacle in due time. There is not one of these who would not readily admit the debt he owes to this Association. And who can say what exalted positions will be occupied in another 25 or 30 years by some of the youngest and almost unknown of to-day's enthusiasts in the work of the Association, perhaps by several of you in this room?

Our Association steadily progressed through the years, persuading local authorities in various parts of the country to include subjects appertaining to librarianship in their evening school syllabuses, organising correspondence courses, and culminating in taking over, at the request of the Library Association, the organisation and conduct of all correspondence classes. The colossal nature of this section of the Association's activities may be judged from the statement in the Annual Report that 1,153 courses were arranged during last year, representing nearly 100 per cent. increase on the last full year before the War, and nearly 800 per cent. increase upon the figure when our Association took over from the parent body. It is the Association's keen regret that in spite of urgent appeals for tutors—and there are at present about 50 on the

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panel—there are not sufficient to cater for all would-be students, and a number of courses must perforce be refused.

It is said with truth in the Annual Report that the Association's real strength lies in its Divisional organisation. I am proud to be a member of the oldest Division—the Yorkshire Division—which was formed, as I think several others were formed, largely as the result of the energetic efforts of a great librarian who is still in harness, and whose name will live long after many others have been forgotten. I refer to Mr. W. C. Berwick Sayers, who at that time was Honorary Secretary of the Association. I had occasion recently to turn up some records of the Yorkshire Division, and I came across a report of the first annual meeting of the Branch—the term "Division" was not used until some time after the first World War. That meeting was addressed by Mr. W. Benson Thorne and Mr. Berwick Sayers as Chairman and Honorary Secretary respectively of the Association. During the course of his remarks Mr. Sayers referred to the rate limit—I said earlier that this topic cropped up at almost every meeting—and said that it would not last more than another generation, and that the changed resources would mean changed conditions of service, new positions, higher recognition, but more stringent demands. When that came about the assistant would be paid a salary equivalent to that earned by the sub-librarian, or even the chief librarian, of the time at which he was speaking, but the public would see that it was earned. I wonder if Mr. Sayers has ever realised how truly prophetic he was on that occasion.

But I digress again. No national organisation can hope to flourish in this country if all its activities are centred around one particular geographical area, whether it be London or any other. Our own Association is divided into thirteen Divisions, covering the whole of England and Wales, each operating within the framework of the Association, but possessing a considerable measure of local autonomy. Each Division has its own officers and committee, and arranges its meetings to suit the convenience of its members. The education of the assistant, using the term "education" in its widest sense, is the *raison d'être* for all our meetings, national and divisional. Visits are frequently arranged to places bearing a direct or indirect interest upon our work, and the papers which are read, together with the discussions which ensue, all play their part in that important training of the young librarian which will help him towards success in his professional career. The venue of our Divisional meetings may be any city, town, or lesser authority which can be persuaded to loan to us a room in which we can meet. In actual fact, although that is the minimum which we must have before we can hold a meeting at all, it is the almost invariable practice for local authorities who are approached to offer hospitality, and not infrequently on a very generous scale. Only a few months ago I presided at a meeting held in an Urban District Council authority, and I learned that our Association was the first organisation representing any body of local government officers which had ever been entertained by the Council—and what hospitality! The British Restaurant was tastefully decorated for our benefit by the Parks Department, the meal would have been considered excellent in 1939, and the Library Committee, consisting of every member of the Council, turned out in force to entertain us. That type of welcome, if perhaps on a slightly less lavish scale, awaits us wherever we go, and it is a measure of the high regard in which our Association is held by local authorities, and of which we are extremely proud.

A major change in the affairs of the Association has taken place by the development of the Divisional organisation over a period of 40 years. I am not satisfied, however, that we have yet achieved all that we can in this direction. Valuable as is the work carried out in the Divisions, the fact remains that some of them are very large; so large,



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in fact, that the principal objection to one great central body—inability to attend meetings on account of distance—applies with almost equal force. The North Western Division has already tackled this problem successfully by splitting the Division into two sections, and I look forward to the day when other large Divisions will do likewise. A big Division with big attendances at meetings is much to be desired; but smaller “happy family” meetings also have their place in the scheme of things. These are the meetings at which the youngest and most nervous assistant will eventually find his feet.

A President cannot lay down policy, but I do not want to leave you to-day without suggesting a few fruitful lines on which our Association may develop. We are somewhat mixed up together, both with NALGO and with our parent body, but it is abundantly clear from recent letters in the “Library Association Record” that we have a character and an individuality as strong as ever, though as difficult to define as the British Constitution. Once again let me ask, what are we? We are not a Trade Union, and personally I am glad that what are called bread and butter matters are being increasingly handled by NALGO, or for those of us who are not in Local Government, by the Burnham Committee or similar bodies. The A.A.L. should, I suggest, lose no opportunity of impressing the qualities and attainments of library assistants upon NALGO while remaining predominantly a professional association. Our Education Committee has loyally accepted the new examination syllabus with its heightened demands while constantly urging alternative questions, greater definition of standards, fuller co-ordination of examiners’ markings and other points that greatly handicap those of you in outlying areas. We shall continue to represent the youngest and the most unfortunate of you—the man in the specialised library with few professional contacts and little general background of books to broaden his horizon—the girl in the county branch fifty miles from Headquarters. Some of us feel that there will be need of our correspondence courses long after 1951 when the Library Association propose that all parts of their examinations shall be taken at one sitting, and we have been putting our house in order by working towards minimum standard courses in all subjects. Is there much more that we can do in this direction? And here I pass the ball to you; you must talk amongst yourselves, ventilate your suggestions at meetings; see that you get the right men and women on your committees. You have a war behind you in which many of you held high responsibilities out of all proportion to your years. Many new possible activities for our Association are open for you to explore, such as the institution of travelling scholarships, staff exchanges and week-end schools. And if you run contrary to your Chiefs—and I fervently hope you will not—let it be only on the question of the right of each one of you to have a responsible job and to experiment in it. We all know libraries where no one but Miss Smith is allowed to touch the electric pen, and it is our duty to ask for the education of our members at their work as well as after it. To paraphrase a sentence of the Annual Report “the Association is yours to develop as you think best; you have a solid foundation of more than half a century’s growth on which to build.”

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*Divisional News.* Pressure on space has made it impossible to print Divisional Notes and News in this issue. It is hoped in the near future to publish a résumé of material supplied by Divisional Secretaries, who are urged to be as brief as possible in their communications without sacrificing essential information.



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### The County Scene

F. A. Sharr

A COUNTY LIBRARY is to all intents and purposes a closed access library [cries of "Oh," as the Parliamentary reports say]. Though slightly exaggerated that statement is true.

The basic service points of the County Library are the village centres, collections of perhaps 200-500 books, and these small collections are the only part of the county stock to which the rural reader has open access. Looking as we do, from the top downwards, we see a vast stock of books, hundreds of thousands of them, located all over the county; but looking, as the reader and the potential reader does, upwards, he sees only his village centre, with its box or case of books; the further ramifications of the book stock, to us so clear, are to him unknown and therefore unobtainable. "But," you will say, "there is the Students' Service." True, but how much is it used, except by a small minority? From your annual postal issue deduct the issues to Branch Libraries, and express the remainder per head of population, and I think you will find the issues per head are very small. Or if you distrust figures, go out into the country areas, take a really good book display to some local show or exhibition where your potential readers will gather, and before long a conversation something like this will start:

*He: Have you any books on—?*

*You: Oh, yes, we've this, and this, and this.*

*He: This one's jolly good. I didn't know you could get books like this from the County Library.*

*You: Oh, we have a great many more on—than we could show here, and we shall be very pleased to send you any you want.*

*He: Do you have a catalogue of your books?*

*You: No—er—I'm afraid we don't, you see . . . (and here follows a—to you—perfectly good explanation of why he cannot have a catalogue: why, in fact, he can never know the riches you have to offer).*

No! From the country reader's point of view we are closed access libraries—without even an Indicator!

I do not suggest that we install a Cotgreave Mk. II, worked by radar, in every village centre, but I do suggest that we ought to face up to this serious deficiency in our service and do something about it. Everywhere I go, the same question crops up: "Do you publish a catalogue?" ; a definite demand exists, and so far as I know, no county has taken effective steps to satisfy it. The problem is fundamental to County Library work; it is, briefly, how to make known in several hundred places at once the total resources of the whole system, not only to existing readers, but to the potential readers who far outnumber them.

Regionalization is of some help, but it does not go far enough; it permits those who have occasion to visit the nodal town at which the Regional Library is established, to have access to a stock of perhaps 20,000-50,000 volumes; but even if a complete county catalogue were maintained in every Regional Library, it would not greatly help

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the readers who do not visit the town frequently. And since social habits are not constrained by local government boundaries in no county could Regional Libraries be established at all the natural nodal points.

Booklists are of some help, but they, too, do not go far enough. The general booklist, published monthly or quarterly, is of value to the reader who wants new books because they are new, but are of no use to the reader who wants to know everything the library has on a particular subject.

The subject list, on the other hand, is of value to the reader who is interested in that particular subject, but can only be successful if it is addressed to a particular class of readers and compiled with the needs of that class clearly in mind. A booklist on Education, for example, might be addressed to teachers or to parents, but the choice of books, their arrangement and their annotation would be different in each case. The same booklist could not effectively serve both types of reader; if it attempted to do so it would satisfy neither. To cover every subject with such lists would require so many as to cause serious confusion, both to readers and staff, and to keep them up to date would be almost impossible. A subject booklist is an advertisement; its proper aim is to tempt people to read, by presenting a selection of books on one subject or on a number of subjects which all relate to one theme. But as it is an advertisement it must be addressed to one particular type of reader.

The reader who says "Have you got a catalogue?" is expressing accurately what he wants—a catalogue, a fairly complete and reasonably up-to-date printed list of all the books in the library. Fiction we may leave out of account, the need is for a non-fiction catalogue. Clearly the facts which forced libraries, both urban and county, to abandon complete bound catalogues years ago will still apply, but equally clearly this demand exists and we cannot just ignore it. What then is the solution?

This problem must exist in all counties, and I should very much like other people's views, but to start the ball rolling I will outline one possible scheme.

There are twelve main classes in Dewey, counting biography and travel as separate classes. There are twelve months in the year. Some months are busier than others, some classes are larger than others. Arrange therefore to publish an initial catalogue of one class each month for a year. Each class catalogue need not be complete, for there are a lot of almost dead books in every library which could be omitted without a corresponding reduction in the value of the catalogue, but it should be nearly complete.

Having published the initial twelve class catalogues, it would be necessary to keep them up to date, both for additions and withdrawals. Annual supplementary class catalogues should therefore be issued, one class each month. After a definite interval, a completely new catalogue would be issued, class by class. If two such cumulated class lists were produced each year the whole would be completed in six years. Withdrawal of last copies in any class would be permitted only at the time when the cumulated catalogue of that class was published, which would not include the titles to be withdrawn. This would afford an admirable opportunity for systematic revision of stock in each subject.

This sketch is intentionally only in outline, but I should like other people with other experience to suggest details. Such a scheme must be costly, but there is no reason why libraries of similar book stock and book fund should not co-operate in the compilation of such a catalogue, and so reduce the cost. Even so the cost would be

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considerable, but it would be justified. We are justified in spending thousands of pounds on books; we should be similarly justified in spending far less on making those books known and available.

[*Editorial note.—It may be remembered that Dorset County Library published a complete printed catalogue of non-fiction stocks in 1936. Whether or not that catalogue has been revised, amended or re-issued is not known, but information on the point would be welcome.*]



### A.A.L. Correspondence Courses

Correspondence Courses in the sections mentioned below will be arranged to run from April to June of the following year, and from November to December of the following year. The Courses, conducted under the auspices of the A.A.L. (Section of the L.A.), comprise ten monthly lessons, consisting of a prescribed selection of technical reading, hints and advice on study and practical work and questions or subjects for essays upon which the tutor will write comments or corrections.

The subjects treated and the respective fees are as follows :—

**Entrance Examination.**—The Course covers the whole of the L.A. requirements for this examination. Fee, £2 10s. 0d.

**Registration Examination.**—Group (a) (i) Classification—Fee, £1 15s. 0d.; (ii) Cataloguing—Fee, £1 15s. 0d. Group (b) (iii) and (iv) Bibliography and Assistance to Readers in the choice of books—Fee, £2 10s. 0d. Group (c) (v) Library Organization and Administration—Fee, £1 15s. 0d.; (vi) History of English Literature—Fee, £1 15s. 0d.

**Final Examination.**—Part 1, Bibliography and Book Selection—Fee, £2 0s. 0d. Part 2, Library Organization and General Librarianship—Fee, £2 0s. 0d. Part 3, Library Routine and Administration : (a) Public Libraries—Fee, £2 0s. 0d.; (b) University and College Libraries—Fee, £2 0s. 0d.; (v) Special Libraries and Information Bureaux—Fee, £2 0s. 0d. Part 4, Literary Criticism and Appreciation : (a) Modern Literature—Fee, £2 0s. 0d. Part 5, Specialist Certificates : (c) Advanced Classification—Fee, £1 15s. 0d.; Advanced Cataloguing—Fee, £1 15s. 0d.; (d) Historical Bibliography—Fee, £2 0s. 0d.

Non-members of the Library Association are charged double fees.

Students wishing to enter for a Course must obtain an application form from and send it (together with the appropriate fee) to the Joint Hon. Education Secretaries, Carnegie Library, Herne Hill Road, London, S.E.24. Applications must reach the above before 20th March and 20th October for the April and November courses respectively.

**Important.**—Before entering for a Course, students are particularly advised to make themselves familiar with the regulations governing the examination, as printed in *The Library Association year book*. Any queries concerning the examinations or the syllabus should be sent direct to The Library Association and not to The Association of Assistant Librarians.

## The Library Assistant

### Students' Problems

A. J. Walford

The resumption of this feature, after a lapse of more than five years, has been prompted by the A.A.L. Education Committee. It is not proposed to alter the original pattern to any appreciable extent. Study technique, the discussion of debatable points, and a survey of the June and December Library Association examination papers will continue to form the staple diet of these occasional pages. But certain factors are clearly bulking much larger than they once did and must be taken into account. Text-books are becoming extremely difficult to procure or borrow; when they do appear in bookshops, they are usually re-issues of pre-war editions. There is, for example, a '1947 impression' of *Library stock and assistance to readers*, by L. R. and E. R. McColvin (1936), a volume which cries out for revision. And now that Bibliography and Assistance to Readers in the Choice of Books forms such an important part of the Registration syllabus, it is surely unfair to the average student to have to wait his patient turn for the loan of a copy of Dr. Esdaile's excellent *Student's manual of bibliography*, long out of print. It may be heartening to learn from Grafton's that a fourth edition of Sharp's *Cataloguing* is in the press, but the price is rather prohibitive for the modest purse.

To counterbalance the book situation, there is much more formal education up and down the country, and the change of emphasis from text-books to oral tuition is surely in the best tradition, however necessary the former may be. Books need to be interpreted because they are, after all, only tools and partial guides; lecturers should, in the best sense of the word, put them in their place. I have known too many students who insist on regarding certain manuals as 'Bibles' for examination purposes, to be quoted chapter and verse; they are content to cram unquestioningly the material between those appointed two covers and to look no further. It is surely a bad habit for a librarian in the making to practise such rigid book-selection in his studies. The student of librarianship—since here is a subject within a subject—needs background and the comparative outlook. Examiners have consistently despaired because of the lack of these qualities and probably always will. But if students are to have their 'Bibles,' let them be revised versions, studded with marginal notes and queries of their own. In Classification, for instance, we all know the student who offers Sayers and Phillips, word for word, in and out of season. Admittedly, it is rather an impertinence to expect an assistant with, say, three years' library training to sit in judgment on Bliss. But this is not to deny the right of any student to his or her own opinion on controversial issues. If you feel that Byron is by far the greatest of the Romantic poets, have the courage of your convictions and say as much in your answer to an examination question; but remember that you will have to prove your case and win over the examiner who may feel otherwise.

To cultivate the habit of questioning the conclusions and findings of others is a tall order for the student whose chief wish is to rush through his examinations in a minimum period of time, but at least one can be vigilant, regarding speculation on no subject as exhausted and no text-book as finally definitive. Cutter claimed evolutionary and scientific order for his *Expansive Classification* and this claim is often exalted to the rank of a statement of fact. Too many have glibly accepted Cutter's remarks on this subject at his own valuation, and yet one has only to remember the

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ludicrously high priority given to A-Z order of subdivisions in his scheme to realise that Cutter's claim needs investigation. On the other hand, how many students gloomily shake their heads at the lack of theoretical refinements in the Library of Congress Classification, as if such things were the last word in a shelf classification ! We cannot all have the privilege of seeing these schemes in practice, but no doubt facilities will increase in this direction. It is, of course, a counsel of perfection to insist always on the first-hand acquaintance with one's material, whether it be a Shakespeare play, colliotype illustration, the agenda of a library committee, or incunabula.

Reviews have already appeared of Dr. Savage's *Manual of book classification and display*. The one point I wish to make here is to caution the student against drawing upon the examples from the Universal Decimal Classification which appear on pages 42-43. The U.D.C. number for 'Scotland' is (411), not (41); the covering dates of a period of time are not expressed thus : "563 : 1908," but thus : "563/1908." The student is to be warned against the assumption that Dewey numbers are necessarily imported into U.D.C. with very little change. The contents of U.D.C.'s 629.11/.12 is a case in point.

I do not propose, at this late stage, to single out more than a few points for comment in the June 1947 examination papers. It is hoped that the December papers will here be dealt with more promptly and on a more formal basis by a number of contributors. (I should be very glad to have the assistance of any tutors who feel themselves moved to undertake this.) Viewing the examinations as a whole, I felt that the papers were scrupulously fair. True, there is a certain air of mystery attached to one of the questions set in the Final, Part 1, Bibliography and Book Selection : 'Name and describe the most important general bibliographies of English books published since 1880.' But no reasonable person, surely, would attempt a history of bibliography-making since 1880, in answering this question ? The meaning is patent enough.

In the Registration papers, which, presumably, concern the majority of students, the English Literature paper seemed well-balanced both as to period and to form ; poetry, the drama, prose, and the novel were all represented. Any student worth his salt should have felt at home with at least six of these questions. Much the same applies to the two Bibliography papers ; if the candidate had covered the groundwork of the syllabus conscientiously and had practised expressing himself in good, plain English, he had little to fear. In answering questions on technical processes, the temptation is always for one to write too much and to forget the exact phrasing of the question and the points that require to be made. In the case of the second paper, 'Assistance to Readers in the Choice of Books,' one either knows or does not. *Paru*, for the benefit of those who are still in the dark, is an attractive French literary monthly which gives useful reviews of some 150 books chiefly, but not entirely, French. A feature of *Paru* is its arrangement ; the first part deals with imaginative literature, which covers novels, poetry, and drama ; the second part covers essays, literature (as a subject), biography, geography, and travel, economics, and so forth ; and there is a useful index giving author, title, price, and publisher. The Cataloguing paper still gave an opportunity for practical cataloguing to those who wanted to show their initiative, but it is to be feared that the average student made for the more humdrum and 'safe' questions. In the Classification paper there appears to be a vogue for questions which ask candidates to 'un-build' classification numbers, this being by no means confined to the Dewey notation. This is good practice, but, once again, it will probably only attract the candidate with enterprise and imagination. These qualities always were, and probably always will be, at a premium.

## The Library Assistant Savage on Display<sup>1</sup>

S. C. Holliday

MOST books on librarianship—not only British books—are dreary claptrap. They cluster thickly round the nadir of knowledge. Contrived by earnest souls who vaguely feel that reading is a *good thing*, they rarely touch upon the true subject of librarianship (which, surprisingly enough, is the contents of books) but dwell—with a grim insistence that produces undulant hysteria in the reader—upon the mighty matter of clerical routine. The textbooks doubtless have had a profound influence upon the educational programme of The Library Association, which appears to have the aim of generating reasonably sound second-rate clerks.

Bearing this in mind, let us turn to the position of Dr. Savage in the literature of librarianship. Dr. Savage is, we know, alert and intelligent, a man of humour. As such, he is not a typical librarian; certainly his state of mind in no way resembles that of the typical library assistant; for the characteristic of the latter is a malign seriousness utterly depressing to the beholder. But Savage differs. He is, as we have said, an alert man, a man of witty perceptions. Dare we venture then on a description of his mood when his books are lauded in reviews? He has gained great reputation by his works,<sup>2</sup> they are “eagerly awaited,” they seem to be objects of despairing envy. But he must receive his praises with sardonic astonishment, for he must know that that reputation, those commendations, have been gained (apart from the mental and physical effort of authorship) without too great a cost.

Is that a derogatory statement? By no means. What is the character of Savage's achievement? Briefly, what he has done is to express clearly, honestly, and often humorously those views that librarians should arrive at if they thought at all; in fact, Savage's great asset is moral courage, for he says outright what many would say if they did not fear to stray from an orthodoxy that has no writ for its existence, and which lies like a dead hand across our work. “Die-hard denizens of the Athenaeum Club,” says Dr. Savage, “are radicals beside the crusted Tories of British librarianship.” There were, before the war, a group of (then young) librarians of whom much might have been expected: their existence seemed to promise a period of renaissance such as that of Edwardian days, when Savage was experimenting with transatlantic methods at Bromley, when Brown was committing the unpardonable by letting readers see the books they had paid for, when Cannons was producing a bibliography of librarianship that for sheer work has yet to be equalled; when was said nearly everything that has been trotted out as new and remarkable during the following forty years. But where are those sprigs of promise now? If they remain unorthodox, then their unorthodoxy is the moribund creed of a moribund Bloomsbury. May we expect anything from them other than the dull doings of dull dogs? We may not.

Dr. Savage's new work is another exercise in honest, clear expression of views that ought to have been put forward years ago. The first four chapters, which deal with “display by formal classification,” contain some of the best criticisms and evaluations of classification schemes and classing methods that have appeared for years. Dr. Savage has come back, with relish, to discuss his appreciation of the ideas of Wyndham Hulme, his respect for whom has already been shown in *Special librarianship in general libraries*. Hulme, he says, was the first to change our approach to book classification, and, as we study Hulme's work, “we cannot help regretting that other classification

<sup>1</sup> Savage, Ernest A. *Manual of book classification and display for public libraries*. Allen and Unwin (1947), 12/6d.

<sup>2</sup> Let it be understood that works on librarianship are being considered here, not Dr. Savage's contributions to general scholarship.

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makers have preferred to be governed by some imaginary 'true order of the sciences' rather than . . . by bibliographical warrant." (This quotation may profitably be read alongside the Bliss-Broadfield altercation in a contemporary.) Classification is but book grouping, claims Dr. Savage, a rather delightful art, not a science, for "classing, in the exact meaning of the term, is a logical absurdity when books are concerned." The author has already told us, in *Special librarianship*, that "the theory of classification may be neglected almost wholly without the slightest loss to the student," but he who wishes to see a powerful mind at work both on the theory and the practice of classification will do well to read these four chapters. He would be foolish, probably, to agree with all that is said, but he may learn more about classification from these few pages than from the dismal standard tomes on the subject, for Dr. Savage's aim has been to "throw off the fetters of pedantry and vain endeavour." And yet this reviewer has heard solemn tutors declare that the new Manual is perhaps dangerous for students, for it may give them the wrong approach to the examinations. "Weep for the dead, for light hath failed him; and weep for a fool, for understanding hath failed him."

Doubtless most readers will reserve their main interest for the larger part of this book, which deals with practical display, methods, materials, and showmanship. Dr. Savage envisages a "home reading library as an exhibition of books," and then shows us how to make an exhibition live. But whether the many sound ideas and the many clear demonstrations will break through the orthodox crust is a matter for conjecture. Much lip-service will be given: little may be done. Savage's plea for *vulgar* display will send tremors through the breasts of the stodgy, who are even now "brightening" their libraries with some ghastly garland of book-jackets, or some vomit-worthy banter in their booklists. (Savage, it may be pointed out, is merely indulging in puckishness with this use of the word "vulgar." Later, he bends over backwards to show his good taste in colour values and relationships.) But let us be no doubt about it, were libraries less uncharted, were there less of the discreet, shabby genteel atmosphere of a local government department, and more of the opportunism and cleaner air of the big department store, then public time, staff agony, much general bewilderment, more general depression, baffled fury and melancholy flux would be spared or saved.

Dr. Savage's ideas on display are bright, instructive, and eminently practicable if one has room; for good display, like good gardening, depends on space between the exhibits. Librarians have lagged behind curators, for modern museum men, with far less naturally attractive material than books to arrange, have achieved results of which the brilliant book boys seem unaware. Is it not a fact, should we not admit it, that the reason for our dowdiness, our lack of normal foresight, is that we fail to see readers as men, women and children? That very word "borrower" has an official, impersonal, patronizing connotation that, to put it plainly, stinks. Let us see readers as *people*—and as guests—and then, if we have any manners at all, the things we now consider as innovations, as evidences of a forward view (whatever that may be) will fall into place as common courtesies between friendly public employees and a friendly public. There is nothing new or outrageous or peculiar about display: shops, pubs, women and nature have been doing it for years. Let us be ordinary, and copy them.

Dr. Savage's new book is indeed a most stimulating, thought-provoking, and—to this reviewer's mind—exciting work. On a second reading one perceives that parts of it are trite, parts long-winded, parts garrulous; and there are parts the author should have written, laughed over, and then torn up. But who cares! This is a book not only of practical assistance to us, but one to which we will turn with relief when our spirits flag, and when we grow despondent at all there is to do.



## The Library Assistant

### Correspondence

The Central Library, Croydon.

The Editor, *The Library Assistant*.  
Sir,—

*Berwick Sayers : The Library Committee*

I have been both interested in, and gratified by, the letters of Mr. W. J. Murison and Mr. E. F. Ferry.

Mr. Ferry is possibly right when he suggests that the word "statutory" has taken on a more limited meaning than it had when I wrote my paper. Then, at Croydon and elsewhere, the library committee was included under "Statutory Committees," I suppose on the ground that it was operated under special Statutes—the Libraries Acts. That was the only meaning I then attached to the adjective. It is an orthodox dictionary one. I hoped the whole tenor of the paper suggested that the Acts were adoptive; and I was very careful in my first paragraph to refer students to a higher authority on law than I.

Your correspondent also has a right to question my use of the word "may" in connexion with the fact that some Scottish burghs may be called upon to contribute to the county for library purposes, in addition to paying for their own burgh services. The word "may" was used to indicate that there were exceptions. Mr. Ferry names four.

Mr. Murison raises an interesting point. I believe the exact position is that library authorities of burghs and parishes must appoint annually a committee of between ten and twenty members, half of whom, at least, must be members of the local authority or magistrates and the rest may be householders. But Mr. Hewitt also tells us (*Public Library Law*, page 42) "County library committees consist of not less than one-third or more than one-half of persons not members of the education committee but resident in the district." I think Mr. Hewitt means that from one-half to two-thirds of the committee must be of members of the authority or magistrates.

We all know too painfully that there are several anomalies in current Scottish library law, of which the rate limit of threepence, a sum now less in value than the old much execrated penny, is the worst. All of us who care for libraries are hoping, and working as far as we can, for a new Scottish Libraries Act.

May I add that I am still a "regular reader" of *The Library Assistant*, always with pleasure and no little profit.

Yours faithfully,

W. C. BERWICK SAYERS.

\* \* \*

*Mr. W. J. Murison writes:—*" . . . I want to make it clear that my suggested amendment of Mr. Sayers' sentence on county library committees, in a letter to *The Library Assistant* of November-December, 1946, was descriptive of current practice, and was not intended as a definition of the statutory position which is as follows:—

"The county education committee may appoint a library sub-committee of which not less than half must be members of the county council, and the remainder, other residents. Where a library was operated by a parish council prior to 1929, the local committee which may be appointed for the library administration of that district must consist of not less than one-third and not more than one-half of persons, not members of the education committee, resident in the area."